

VZCZCXR08608
RR RUEHDBU
DE RUEHMO #2571/01 2861424
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 131424Z OCT 09
FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 5069
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
RUEHHD/MOSCOW POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MOSCOW 002571

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/12/2019

TAGS: PGOV PREL PHUM PINR KDEM KCOR RS

SUBJECT: TULA REGIONAL ELECTIONS: UNITED RUSSIA CUTS OUT
OPPOSITION

Classified By: Deputy Political Minister Counselor David Kostelancik.
Reason: 1.4 (b), (d).

¶11. (SBU) Summary: With new, less democratic voting rules in place, Tula Oblast elections were held October 11. Discussions with opposition party groups revealed that United Russia has a firm grip on the region and United Russia-backed governor Viacheslav Dudka had already orchestrated a massive victory for his party. Preliminary election results also indicate a United Russia lead, followed by Just Russia, and the Communist Party. End Summary.

¶12. (SBU) We visited Tula City, a three hour train ride south of Moscow, September 28-29 to check in on the regional parliamentary election process. On October 11 elections took place for Tula Oblast Duma's 48 seats in the legislature. While results are still coming in, our sources at the election monitoring NGO, GOLOS, and the National Democratic Institute (NDI) told us October 12 that United Russia was leading with 40 percent, Just Russia at 26 percent, and the Communist Party (KPRF) with 22 percent. Tula Oblast is the tenth Russian region to transition to elections by party list only and its party list is based on the 24 municipal entities in the Oblast. According to GOLOS, the controversial Imperiali method of distributing votes was expected to be used for the first time. Moreover, the electoral deposit for registration of candidates was repealed, which means that an institution that used to make it possible to avoid collecting signatures for registration has been eliminated. Candidates were not allowed to run as independents in these elections. Seven parties successfully registered: United Russia, the Communist Party, Just Russia, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDPR), Right Cause, Patriots of Russia, and Yabloko.

Putin Shores up United Russia Support in Tula

¶13. (C) Tula was historically a Communist stronghold, but United Russia now controls all 24 municipals in Tula and all mayors and the governor are also from United Russia. Additionally, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin visited Tula September 14 to shore up support for United Russia prior to the elections. Alexander Savenkov, a journalist at Tulskiy Molodoy Kommunar, told us September 28 that Putin held some "business meetings" in Tula, but they were "in violation of the voting rules, since he is a United Russia party member and he visited a number of enterprises." Charismatic Putin further appealed to Tula residents when he took a moment to give his wrist watch to a factory worker.

¶14. (C) All around Tula, United Russia signs featuring huge pictures of Putin were on display. September 14 Itar-Tass reported that when asked, in a research and development facility in Tula, who deserves to be elected, Putin responded, "Russia stands in need of a political force oriented at responsible decision-making rather than at

fly-by-night stratagems." A September 16 Nezavisimaya Gazeta article notes that, "It goes without saying that Putin's visit boosted United Russia's position in Tula."

¶ 15. (C) Savenkov maintained that United Russia was using its strong administrative resources to help its campaign, and he argued that United Russia would "definitely win" with a likely majority of 65-70 percent. He explained that United Russia could probably get half the vote automatically, but that the party strategically uses its administrative resources to add about 20 percent more to the United Russia vote. According to Savenkov, government workers are often threatened that they will lose their jobs if they do not vote for United Russia. This pressure is especially acute during the economic crisis when unemployment in Tula is an issue and pensions are small. Savenkov explained that the government helps poor people by distributing free vegetables and providing discounts on fuel. This assistance has been timed to coincide with the elections in October. While government bureaucrats provide assistance, they simultaneously "encourage" people to vote for United Russia. After the new Oblast Duma elections, the deputies will recommend the new governor and Savenkov is certain that the Oblast Duma will recommend current United Russia Governor Dudka to Medvedev for an additional term.

Opposition Parties With a Winning Chance

¶ 16. (C) Our sources told us that opposition groups are marginalized in Tula and that the few that do exist are not "real opposition" since they are under the governor's

MOSCOW 00002571 002 OF 003

control.

--KPRF: Oleg Lebedev, a KPRF Deputy, told us September 29 that KPRF has 3,000 members in Tula Oblast and they currently have four seats in the Tula Oblast Duma. They had 73 candidates running, while United Russia had about 140. Lebedev told us that in June this year a new law abolished the single-mandate voting in Tula Oblast and this measure helps KPRF since their candidates were previously unable to easily collect the necessary amount of money to run for those seats. Flyers featuring photos of Stalin and commemorating his upcoming 130th birthday on December 21st were visible all over Tula City and the party seemed to be running a fairly strong campaign.

--Just Russia: According to a September 10 article on the website warweb.ru, Just Russia has a fairly good chance of winning in Tula Oblast since the former head of the Party of Pensioners, Igor Zotov, tops the party list and the party therefore appeals to the many seniors in Tula. We were unable to meet with any Just Russia representatives, but our sources unanimously agreed that Just Russia would come in second or third.

--LDPR: Vadim Vyacheslavovich, LDPR Chief of Staff told us September 29 that 68 LDPR candidates were on the party list, but that about 20 would drop out since they were not all needed for only 48 places. He predicted that his party would get 4-5 seats. He claimed that "the elections are normal and there are no problems." As mentioned above, however, preliminary results did not include an LDPR win.

Opposition Parties Unlikely to Win

¶ 17. (C) According to our sources, Yabloko, Right Cause, Patriots of Russia, and Solidarity all had low to no odds of winning for various reasons. This was proven by the results - none of these parties won representation in Tula.

--Yabloko: Sergei Filatov, a deputy in the Tula City Duma who recently left the Right Cause party, told us that there are

1,000 Yabloko members in the Tula Oblast. Journalist Savenkov told us that Yabloko was unlikely to get enough votes to pass the threshold since it is a new party in the Tula Oblast, and he confirmed that Yabloko members face harassment and were arrested a few weeks ago while trying to pass out their campaign literature.

--Right Cause: When Filatov moved from Right Cause to Yabloko, according to a Yabloko press release, about 100 members of Right Cause also defected to the Yabloko party and more are expected to follow after passing certain formalities. Savenkov told us that Right Cause is very weak in Tula since it is a new party.

--Patriots of Russia: According to Savenkov, "Patriots of Russia are like clowns and nobody supports them."

--Solidarity: Solidarity is not registered as a party and is therefore not allowed to run. The group has held some protests, mostly against Putin, and its members have been arrested numerous times.

Influence from Outside the System

¶8. (C) Alexander Letnikov, leader of the Russian Peoples' Democratic Union (RNDS), which has 5,000 members in the Tula Oblast, claimed September 29 that there are two distinct types of opposition: one within the system, and one outside of it. Those outside the system, such as RNDS, a government watchdog group with its own website, have no ability to participate in the elections since there are no single-mandate seats, independent candidates are not allowed to run, and unregistered parties are not allowed to participate. Letnikov coordinates "Civil Forum," which includes members of Yabloko, Solidarity, United Civil Front, the Russian Communist Party, KPRF, LDPR, small businesses, and several other activist groups who meet regularly to discuss issues such as communal services, unemployment, and road problems. Letnikov also coordinates observers, such as GOLOS, to monitor the elections. Letnikov argued that Tula is under "authoritarian control" and that all candidates have agreed with the government structure so they are protected in the elections. He reiterated that these would not be "not open, free, fair, or real elections" and that "everything is orchestrated and the entire Tula Oblast government structure is under control of United Russia."

MOSCOW 00002571 003 OF 003

Russia's Concept of Democracy

¶9. (C) "People in Tula want democracy, but there is no real choice and no democracy...people are also tired of deep corruption," according to Yabloko's Filatov. He told us that the media is not an effective instrument and journalists do not speak out much in Tula. Filatov explained, "In Russia people view it as dangerous if there is too much freedom. Russia has laws, but laws and reality are not in synch. Power is controlled. It takes many generations to learn democracy....It has been less than 20 years since the collapse of the Soviet Union. The market is still sensitive and depends on oil and gas and democracy is very young. It will take 100 years to develop true democracy in Russia."

Comment

¶10. (C) Tula Oblast elections demonstrated once again United Russia's strong grip on power in the regions. While the Russian political system is under the generally popularly accepted control of United Russia, it is significant that the party and regional officials (with the backing of Moscow) go to such great lengths to pad their victories.

Beyrle